

Winter Checklist for Homeowners

Heating and Air Conditioning:

- Give your heating system a test run. An annual HVAC maintenance check is always a good idea and will significantly prolong the life of your system.
- Replace the air filter (every 1-3 months all through the year!)
- Clean your heat vents, just a handheld vacuum or a rag with soap and water will do.
- If you have one, test and set your humidifier and change the filter. If your filter is not changed as often as recommended, your humidifier can spread mold spores and other bacteria.
- If you have radiant heat, bleed the radiators before you turn on the system for the season. [How-To Video](#).
- Clean leaves and debris out of your AC unit. You don't need to cover it, but if do, just a piece of wood over the top is fine to keep out large debris.
- Window units: remove, clean, and store.
- Fans: If you have ceiling fans, there is usually a switch to reverse the direction to clockwise – this will keep air circulating but minimize warm air from rising.
- Make sure you have a working carbon monoxide alarm on each floor – it should be installed a foot or two above the floor as CO is heavier than air.

Fireplace:

- Clean out any debris and check the integrity of the firebrick.
- Ensure that the flue/damper are in working order. Burn a few pieces of paper to ensure that the smoke rises up and out of the chimney.
- If you use your fireplace frequently, consider getting a professional chimney sweep annually.

Pipes and Water:

- Insulate exposed water pipes in uninsulated or drafty areas anywhere your water pipes are close to outside walls, like an under-sink cabinet. Don't forget about pipes that run overhead as well! Don't go crazy spending money on insulation, the cheap stuff works.
- Turn off your water supply to outdoor spigots at the main valve. After turning off, drain all the remaining water, remove accessories such as hoses and splitters, and insulate the spigot. Store accessories indoors.
- Blow out your sprinkler system (usually done by a professional).
- If you have a sump pump, ensure that the outlet is not blocked (if it gets covered up once the ground is thoroughly frozen, that's ok). In the spring, check it frequently as the thaw begins. Note: It is a good idea to have a backup energy source for your pump in case the power goes out during a heavy spring thaw!

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Windows and Doors:

- Close up your storm windows or replace removable screens with winter storms.
- Clean/dust window tracks and panes, make sure everything is closing properly.
- Check for significant leaks around your windows with a lighter or match, seal up with weatherproofing if necessary. You can often get free weatherproofing from Xcel Energy.
- Did you know: MNCEE will perform a FREE energy audit on your home that will show you where your biggest losses are. They will also add simple weatherproofing and energy efficient LEDs. Free in Minneapolis, St. Paul and other select cities. Check out [CEE Home Energy Squad](#)

Outdoors and Garden:

- Clear out autumn leaves from the gutters, flat roofs, or anywhere leaves have accumulated.
- Remove bird and insect nests.
- Most people bag and remove their fallen leaves, but did you know you can use your leaves to contribute to the health of your yard? [Check out this article from the Xerces Society.](#)
- Cover or store away patio furniture, grill, firepit, and outdoor lighting not rated for winter conditions (esp. walkway lighting – you will definitely run over it with your snowblower or break it with a shovel, been there.)
- Planters: terracotta and ceramic planters often do not tolerate the freeze-thaw of winter. Put them in the basement or garage, or at the very least put them in a sheltered place and cover them up.
- Clean out your dryer vent!
- Replace worn-out caulking and patch cracked stucco to reduce freeze/thaw damage.
- Drain the gas from the lawn mower (use the rest of it to mulch your leaves!)
- Test-run the snowblower
- Bring in tender plants and bulbs that you want to overwinter – you can overwinter anything from calla lily bulbs, to geraniums, to hot peppers!
- Get your shovel and sand/salt ready to go. [Did you know that salt should only be used in some specific weather conditions?](#) Sand is better for the environment, for pets, and for grip, and you can typically get it free from the city at designated pickup sites.